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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 001881

SIPDIS

DRL/IRF for Michael Mates, EUR/NCE for Scott Brandon

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BULGARIA DENIES ENTRY TO REV. MOON

REF: SOFIA 1847

1. SUMMARY: Unification Church leader Sun Myung Moon was denied permission to enter Bulgaria on October 26 after the MOI deemed his presence "undesirable," citing inability to provide security following the shooting of high-profile banker Emil Kyulev.

2. (SBU) Moon had planned to arrive on October 27 for a two-day visit as part of an ongoing 100-city world tour. According to Bulgarian followers, his stay in Sofia was to include a mass wedding and conference at the Sheraton Hotel. In the week preceding his planned arrival, press stories on Moon triggered protests from nationalist groups and religious leaders opposed to his visit. After members of the right-wing "VMRO" political party and the nationalist extremist group "Ataka" announced plans to demonstrate against Moon's visit, Moon's followers approached the MOI to discuss security for their event.

3. (SBU) According to Robert Williamson, a UK-based representative of the Moon-affiliated Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace and member of Moon's advance team, these concerns were relayed to the MOI in a letter on October 26. On the same day, the gangland-style shooting of well-known banker Emil Kyulev sent much of the government into high alert (Reftel).

4. (SBU) Late on the afternoon of the 26th, Williamson reported receiving a visit from representatives of the Bulgarian National Security Service. They informed him that due to the crackdown following Kyulev's murder, the MOI would not be able to provide security for Moon's planned event, and that his visit was not advisable in the current situation. When asked for clarification by Moon representatives, the NSS officers replied that if Moon attempted to enter Bulgaria, he would be refused entry. According to Williamson, they indicated that the MOI's decision was not permanent, and that it could be reconsidered at a later date. In a press release issued the same day, the MOI stated "The Ministry of Interior finds the presence of Sun Myung Moon in Bulgaria undesirable."

5. (SBU) Subsequent Embassy inquiries to the MOI revealed that Moon was "banned" from Bulgaria under Article 10, Paragraph 1 of the Law on Foreigners, which forbids entry to foreigners who have "by [their] actions endangered the security or the interests of the Bulgarian state" or who are believed to be "acting against the country's security."

6. (SBU) MOI officials also justified their action by noting that the Unification Church is not legally registered in Bulgaria, and that Moon had planned on entering the country as a tourist while actually intending to conduct religious services. Moon representatives countered that their organization has made repeated attempts to register over the past ten years, but has been prevented from doing so by red tape and bureaucratic delays. According to Williamson, Moon does not hold a Bulgarian visa, but had planned to enter Bulgaria under a visa waiver program using his South Korean passport. Bulgarian immigration law currently makes no provision for religious worker visas.

7. (SBU) Moon has faced similar travel bans in many other countries. He is currently banned from entering the Schengen zone due to a German-imposed "immigration exclusion" alleging that he is a cult leader dangerous to the country's youth. Japan has refused him entry based on his 1981 conviction for tax fraud in the U.S., while the U.K. agreed to lift a longstanding entry ban for the purposes of Moon's current world tour.

8. (SBU) Despite banning Moon's visit, GOB authorities did allow his deputy, Song Yong-Chol, to enter the country, and Moon's followers conducted their planned meetings on October 27 without any interference.

9. (SBU) COMMENT: We believe that the GOB's move to prevent Moon's visit was a last-minute decision made out of concern for security and political expediency rather than religious intolerance. It is difficult to overstate how seriously Kyulev's murder has shaken a Bulgarian establishment already

struggling to establish effective rule of law. Regardless of its context, however, the travel ban against Moon highlights serious religious freedom concerns as it relates to the registration requirements of the 2002 Confessions Act and the willingness of the GOB to stand up for the rights of non-traditional religious groups. We will continue to emphasize these concerns to our Bulgarian contacts and will report substantive developments as appropriate.

BEYRLE